

## State Technical Committee (STC) Meeting Minutes

**Date, Location, and Time:** June 30, 2015; Bradford Farm, Columbia, MO; 8:30am-12:00pm\*

**Moderator:** Nate Goodrich

**Department of Agriculture (USDA) Representatives in Attendance:** J.R. Flores, Alan Powell, Curt McDaniel, Harold Deckerd, Dwaine Gelnar, Karen Brinkman, Mike Squires, Doug Peterson, Emily Murray, Sonja Williams, Chris Hamilton, Lauren Cartwright, Marty Comstock

**Members/Individuals in Attendance:** Colleen Meredith, Ken Struempf, Bill White, Bruce Wilson, Charlotte Rathert, Barbara Li, Alicia Lloyd, Todd Sampsell, Chris McLelend, Michael Kelley, Kenda Flores, Bob Broz, Chris Klenklen, John Burk, Beverly Dometrorch, Eric Fuchs, John Wingo, Darrick Steen, Bill Wilson, Jim Boschert, Kenny Lovelace, Terry Spence, Dale Blevins, Nick Prough, Gary Heggemann, Amy Hamilton, Dan Engemann, Kurt Boeckmann, Colette Weckenborg, Robert Ridgley, Garrett Hawkins, Bob Ball, Elsa Gallagher, Jenifer Eggemeyer, Julie Asher, Matt Matheney, Wayne Morton, Tim Gibbons, Lisa Potter, H. Ralph Gaw, Margot McMillen, Richard Hoelscher, Kat Logan Smith, Leslie Holloway, Roger Allison, Alan Freeman, Kelly Srigley Werner, Brenda Versives, Frank Oberle, Brad Powell, Shelly Swank, Steve Mahfood, Richard Oswald.

**\*# of Attendees:** 67

### Discussion:

Item	Discussion
1. Welcome	Nate Goodrich opened the meeting.
2. State Conservationist/Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director	J.R. Flores/State Conservationist: Flores thanked everyone for attending and asked attendees to introduce themselves. Flores introduced Allen Powell who was in attendance for Mark Cadle, FSA State Executive Director. Flores explained the role of the STC and his role to chair the committee and give consideration to the recommendations submitted by the committee.
3. Farm Bill Activities [Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) FY 2015 Summary]	Curt McDaniel/Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC)-Programs: McDaniel provided a programmatic overview of Missouri NRCS Financial Assistance (FA) Programs.  EQIP Summary: 2014 - EQIP had 965 contracts, 105,742 contract acres, \$22,132,134 obligations.  2015 - 868 contracts for 101,000 acres for \$22.9 obligated, to date.  CSP Summary: 2014 - CSP had 350 contracts, 188,082 contract acres, \$3,350,000 in obligations.

	<p>2015: 928 expiring CSP contracts renewed for 590,000 acres equaling \$8.9M. 263 CSP General contracts, 117,000 acres, \$1.79M in obligations.</p> <p>Payments: In Calendar Year 14, \$45,000,000 in payments were made to CSP (including Conservation Security Program) and \$20,500,000 in payments were made to EQIP. This is a total of \$65,500,000 for both programs. Payments to date for 2015 are \$16.3M.</p> <p>2015 EQIP funds were allocated as follows: Pasture/Hayland 42.5%, Cropland 23.5%, Animal Feeding/Waste 17.5, Forestland 7.0%, Wildlife 5.0%, Energy 1.5%, Reserve 1.0%, Organic .8%, High Tunnel .8%, and State Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) .5%.</p> <p>In summary, FY15 General EQIP funds increased compared to FY14; currently 5% more money than this time last year. Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) 1.0 funds have seen a substantial decrease, 60%. General subaccounts have seen substantial increases; 60%. Total FY General EQIP to date is \$23,341,918. Total Initiative funds are \$2,924,200. This totals \$26,266,118 which is a 16% increase over this time last year.</p> <p>The EQIP Subcommittee met in April of this year. Comments from that meeting were reviewed and taken into consideration as Missouri NRCS starts to form the policies for FY 16.</p> <p>Proposed FY16 Policies by NRCS:</p> <p>EQIP Ranking Questions: 30% for state ranking and 35% for local ranking. Local ranking questions are put together by local working groups.</p> <p>EQIP Livestock Fund Distribution: 25% of funds for Animal/Waste Feeding and 35% of funds go to Pasture/Hay.</p> <p>Wildlife Subaccount: Allocation remain at 5%.</p> <p>Forest Subaccount: Allocation remain at 7%.</p> <p>Soil Health Subaccount: Create a separate subaccount offering only Cover Crop (340) practice in FY16.</p> <p>EQIP Practice Payment Maximums/Caps: Increase Cover Crop (340) to \$20,000 per year. Decrease Seasonal High Tunnel to \$6,000. Practice payment maximums for practices related to Energy improvements will be considered. Continue with current practice payment caps on remaining practices with maximums in FY15 if practical.</p> <p>EQIP Payment Percentages: Continue with 65% for non-Historically Underserved participants.</p>
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	EQIP Wildlife subaccount: Add Forage and Biomass Planting (512) Native Warm Season Grass scenario.
4. Update of FY 2015 Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	<p>Harold Deckerd, ASTC-Water Resources, gave an overview of FY 2015 ACEP. ACEP is one program with two components, Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) and Wetland Reserve Easements.</p> <p>Missouri has had no ACEP-ALE applications to date.</p> <p>Missouri ranks in the top 10 of states in the number of easements and acres enrolled. Deckerd displayed maps in his presentation showing where easements are located in Missouri.</p>
5. CIG	<p>Dwaine Gelnar discussed the CIG program.</p> <p>There were 17 proposals submitted for the national CIG that involved the state of Missouri.</p> <p>About a month ago, the State Conservationist sent out an announcement for a state CIG. That request for proposals ends July 10. \$100,000 has been allocated. Up to \$50,000 can be used to fund up to 50% of the total cost of a project lasting 1 to 3 years. The sponsor or partners are required to provide a 50% match.</p> <p>Missouri is promoting opportunities for environmental markets. Gelnar invited attendees to read the information provided in the handout. He invited attendees to provide any comments on what they would like to see CIG accomplish in the state to the State Conservationist or to Gelnar. Comments will be taken into consideration for next year.</p>
6. FSA	<p>Allen Powell gave an update on the activities associated with Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). No general sign-up period will be offered again this year. One year reenrollments or extension of the current contracts were offered. Another one year extension will be offered to contracts expiring this year. Secretary announced a general sign-up starting this winter from December 1 through the end of February. Missouri is looking at 150,000 to 160,000 CRP acres that are going to expire in 2016. At this time, FSA doesn't have information on changes to the Environmental Benefits Index or types of seeding to be used in ranking applications.</p> <p>Additional SAFE acres were requested for Bob White Quail and Sand Prairie restoration.</p> <p>General CRP acres are at 1M, down from 4.5M at one time.</p> <p>No haying and grazing regulation changes are anticipated this year.</p>
7. Missouri Department of Agriculture (MoDOA)	<p>Ken Struempf provided a MoDOA update on behalf of Director, Richard Fordyce. MoDOA is working to move the agriculture industry forward in Missouri. Agriculture is the number one industry in Missouri. We have about 10,000 farms that employ about 300,000 employees.</p> <p>Last year, Missouri had record corn and soybean production. Last year we ranked high for several agricultural commodities (corn, soy beans, chickens, cattle, hogs, rice, turkeys, horses, cotton). Missouri agriculture exports have increased over \$1B over the last 5 years. We export to over 150 countries around the world.</p>

	<p>The passage of the Missouri Dairy Revitalization Act and the Agri-Missouri program were discussed.</p> <p>Struempf encouraged everyone to enjoy the upcoming Missouri State Fair in Sedalia.</p>
7. Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Update	<p>Bill White presented a MDC update. The Private Lands Division has 51 staff. Each year they provide benefits to thousands of Missouri landowners. Around \$2M is provided each year for landowner incentives/cost share to put benefits directly on the land.</p> <p>MDC is very interested in cover crops due to the benefits to water quality and wildlife. MDC is working with the University of Missouri Bradford Farm on a CIG. This year MDC will piggyback with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Soil and Water Conservation Program (SWCP) for cover crops cost share.</p> <p>MDC is involved in the new NRCS RCPP. They have partnered with different groups on the Woodland Glade RCPP and the Grassland RCPP. The Woodland Glade is focused mostly on restoring glades and woodlands in the eastern Ozarks. MDC is working with cattle producers on the Grassland RCPP. They are looking at helping these producers convert just a portion of their grasslands to warm season grasses. 100 applications have been received.</p>
8. DNR and SWCP Update	<p>Colleen Meredith gave the names of the new Soil and Water Districts Commission: Gary Vandiver, Chair; H. Ralph Gaw, Vice Chair; Charles Ausfahl; Thomas Bradley, and Jeff Lance. The ex-officio members are J.R. Flores, Richard Fordyce, Lisa Potter, Kenny Lovelace, and Dave Baker</p> <p>The Parks, Soils, and Water Sales Tax is celebrating 30 years. The tax is up for renewal in 2016. It passed in 1984, 1988, 1996, and 2006. The tax benefits the environment and Missouri landowners. A Citizen's Committee that has been established. Several individuals are involved on this committee.</p> <p>2015 Commission and Program Actions were discussed.</p> <p>The Department was awarded an RCPP with the Our Missouri Water Initiative. EQIP funds will be available in seven watershed throughout Missouri. There were 137 applications received.</p> <p>Meredith provided the amount of money allocated to each resource concern, how much has been paid out, and the number of contracts for each. The majority of the spending has went to Sheet/rill and gulley erosion with Grazing Management ranking second in spending.</p> <p>Meredith explained the Governor's recommended FY16 budget for the SWCP. A total of \$49,200,235 is projected to go to the program. \$31M or 63% is projected to go to cost share.</p> <p>There will be a request for proposal for 319 projects coming out this summer.</p>
9. Soil Health	<p>Doug Peterson discussed Soil Health. Nationally, and here in Missouri, NRCS has made a substantial investment in educating landowners on the benefits of practices related to soil health. Currently we are evaluating the most effective methods for utilizing our EQIP cost share funding to assist interested landowners implement soil health related practices and have the</p>

	greatest environmental impact possible. We have three rainfall simulator all over the state, our Plant Materials Center is doing field trials all over the state, our staff are going to national trainings all across the state, we have had field days, and we have published educational materials. We are actively trying to educate staff and producers on soil health.  We are currently studying practices cost per acre and how effective they are for the dollars spent.
9. General Discussion	Flores commended the committee for their passion for conservation. No decision is final at this point and comments delivered today will be considered. Additional comments should be sent to by email through July 14, 2015. Email address is on the business cards supplied in the packet received by all attendees.
10. Adjournment	Meeting adjourned.

#### Questions/Comments from Members/Attendees:

1. Why did the allocation for Energy Initiative have a significant increase in 2015 as compared to past years? The Energy funding seems like a hidden subsidy? **Few applications for actual energy practices have been funded in the past. The funding in previous years had not be enough to fund the actual practices needed by producers with energy resource concerns. To address the significant need, unused funds from other subaccounts were re-allocated to applications containing energy improvement practices. The majority of funds re-allocated to Energy supported historically underserved participants.**
2. Why is NRCS's proposed allocation percentage for livestock funds not in line with the comments provided at the EQIP subcommittee's meeting in April? At the last subcommittee meeting, we decided to move it to 10%. We had eight people who spoke in favor of that, two people who were opposed to that, six of the eight people spoke in favor of family farms. The EQIP Subcommittee did not recommend 25%. The vast majority recommended 10%. 25% is not supported. **We understand the concern voiced. Voting did not occur in EQIP subcommittee meeting and all comments were considered. FY15 livestock funding was analyzed. \$8.2M went towards Pasture/Hay this year which funded most of the high priority applications across the state. There is a considerable amount more demand remaining in Animal Feeding/Waste subaccounts. We believe there is significant demand to support an increase in the allocation to the Animal Feeding/Waste funding pool in FY16 to address high priority natural resource concern such as water quality.**
3. Does NRCS believe the increase in demand, thusly the proposed increased allocation, is attributed to cattle? Confined animals feeding operations for cattle should not be encouraged. The idea there isn't enough applications to meet the pasture allocation is not believable. Either the outreach isn't there or the will isn't there. We know that they are talking about how land is too expensive and farmers need to put up confined buildings for cattle and to be in on the front end of that and pushing it and funding it, is absolutely wrong. The allocation of 25% should be reduced to 10% and it's wrong to suggest such an increase. **Yes, there is an increase in Animal Feeding/Waste demand due to cattle. We appreciate the comments and are making attempts to help farmers and ranchers in the best possible way.**
4. Will the Soil Health subaccount include instructions for screening the level of residue? **Final policies have not been developed for the Soil Health subaccount, but we anticipate applicants with a history of no-till will receive additional points.**

5. What is the current status of prioritizing conversion of fescue to warm season grasses in order to mitigate drought? More funds need to be allocated to this effort. How much money will be available? **In FY16, we are proposing to make available the establishment of native warm season grasses in the Wildlife subaccount. The amount available for the Wildlife subaccount is not known for FY16. In FY15, nearly \$1M was made available.**
6. Comment received relating to previous question. NRCS and MDC are partnering with Quail Forever to fund a Grassland/Grazing Biologist near St. Clair County. Their focus will be working with producers on their grazing systems to address growing concerns over lack of warm season grasslands.
7. If the need is present in the Animal Feeding/Waste side, the proposed allocation of 25% can be supported. Many members of the EQIP subcommittee do not represent people that are directly involved with production agriculture. Substantial gains made by NRCS on the grazing side needs to be considered. If there aren't quality applications remaining, moving funds may make the conservation dollar go further. Would the cropland allocation (23.5%) include Soil Health funding? If so, what would be the percentage allocation to each? **Soil health will be under the cropland subaccount. Each of the NRCS areas (1-4) will have an allocation of money and we will have a state allocation for the Soil Health account. The specific allocation has not been determined at this time. Management of the limited funds will be critical so we ensure quality applications are the ones being selected for funding.**
8. The vast majority, thousands, of animal feeding operations in Missouri are below Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) size. We have thousands of animal feeding operations that would certainly not meet that definition in Missouri. Many of these operations benefit from the conservation dollar that NRCS provides as upgrades to their environmental waste management systems. The idea that all funds for Animals Feeding/Waste goes to CAFOs is not true.
9. As an independent farmer myself, funding for foreign entities operations is discouraging. I was unaware that NRCS was also funding for Energy improvements through lighting and insulation on these types of farms. I do a lot of work with rural entities and most operations are independent farmers that own livestock. Livestock is important to the state of Missouri and funding to foreign entities and out-of-state corporations who are not doing anything for our soil should not occur.
10. Federal government funding should not occur in situations where hog operations are able to sell nutrients to farmers. It's encouraging to see the increased funding for cover crops especially in a year like this when we've seen a lot of rain and possibly a lot of erosion. Funding for cow/calf producers in Missouri needs to be maintained due to problems associated with increased precipitation.
11. Why do we have an EQIP subcommittee where we spend a considerable amount of time discussing the attributes and liabilities of an issue? I would hope that in future technical meetings we could actually discuss what the subcommittee recommendations were, for example that the subcommittee thought 10% was appropriate instead of 25% for the allocation to Animal Feeding/Waste applications. It seems like to me that we are saying here today that what the committee discussed is not considered a recommendation. I feel like we are diluting the intent and purpose of having a group of diverse minded people that are on the committee. Those recommendations of the EQIP subcommittee should be noted. The implications that the EQIP subcommittee recommended 25% is not accurate. **All recommendations from the EQIP subcommittee are taken into consideration along with analysis of the application data and input from our field offices. NRCS feels that we have a significant need and can justify the percentages proposed. NRCS is providing this committee with a proposal and the opportunity to comment. No decision has been made.**

12. Should the EQIP Subcommittee be dissolved? Concerns were voiced over the relevance of the EQIP subcommittee and the recommendations where 8 out of 10 comments supported 10% allocation of funds to Animal Feeding/Waste subaccount. **First, we are not going to disband the EQIP Subcommittee. Secondly, the proposed allocations presented may have not been made clear. The proposed policies presented here today are recommendations to this State Technical Committee, not a description of the comments made at the EQIP subcommittee's meeting. To be clear, there was not a vote the day of the EQIP subcommittee on a percentage allocation that should go to animal waste. NRCS is providing this committee with a proposal and the opportunity to comment. No decision has been made.**

13. The reasoning behind the suggested 10% allocation to Animal Feeding/Waste is to invest as much as possible into pasture operations. The environmental benefits seen from implementing practices in pasture based operations can be experienced all the time. Concerns were voiced on the differences of worth of investment to future generations between practices applied in Animal Feeding/Waste subaccounts and Pasture/Hay subaccounts. The foreign owned factory farms have no investment in the state. They aren't interested in passing on that land to anyone that matters to you or to me. Where are we going to stand on our principles? It is very important that we hold values and that we make decisions that represent Missouri values, not corporate or shareholder values. 10% is an overly generous allocation to Animal Feeding/Waste under the circumstances.

14. There is difficulty in getting landowners interested in diversity in cattle operations. More education is needed on how diversity can be a benefit in our grazing systems and NRCS specifications should be updated to explain the benefit.

15. Comment received relating to previous suggestion. There is a current RCPP project in Missouri encouraging the use of warm season grasses in such a way that it benefits cattle and wildlife. NRCS was commended for looking at practices that address multiple uses such as warm season grasses and cover crops that can address soil health, water quality, and wildlife at the same time.

16. How much stress will the recent weather conditions and flooding put on compliance by NRCS and DNR? Is there going to be any funding made available? **The wet weather will have little to no impact on compliance in 2015. If we determine that compliance in 2016 is impacted due to this year's weather, we'll work with NRCS and FSA to provide a weather related variance.**

17. Has there been any discussion on how to address no applications for the ALE program, such as reworking the numbers to making it easier for nonprofits like the Missouri Prairie Foundation to partner for ALE funds? **Applicants for ALE must be working through a land trust. The program requires a financial commitment or match by the land trust. The states where ALE has been successful are states that a state agency provides a match. We will return funding (\$70,000) due to a lack of applications.**

18. Does NRCS have good data on where the wetlands programs would make an ecosystem impact? **Data is limited. We are currently funding a non-profit that is studying marsh birds on a Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) tract. MDC is also providing funding for observation and studies.**

19. In St. Clair County, most of the land interest for WRP is close to Truman Reservoir. In the past, that land wasn't eligible for WRP due to the flood easement. Is this still the case? **Yes, those lands are not eligible due to the title restrictions. The US Army Corps of Engineers easement agreement requires dry storage for 6 months out of the year. This is not conducive to the requirements for WRP.**
20. Is CIG EQIP? Did the EQIP subcommittee make recommendations during the meeting about CIG? Could we add this to the next EQIP subcommittee meeting? **Yes, the state portion uses EQIP dollars allocated to the state. No, the EQIP subcommittee did not make recommendations on CIG. Last year, we asked for comments and none were received. If you would like to provide comments please do. Yes, if there is a state CIG announcement for FY16, the EQIP subcommittee will be asked to make recommendations.**
21. This year's CRP announcement mentioned grassland may be a part of the program without much detail. Can you provide more information? **Grassland Reserve Program was appealed in the 2014 Farm Bill. The grassland program will be incorporated into CRP. No information has been made available on the administration of the program.**
22. Are CRP contracts that have reached 15 years in length, including contracts with prior extensions, eligible for an additional extension? **By law, a CRP contract cannot be more than 15 years. If a contract ends this year and has reached 15 years, no extension is allowed. Suggest making application for the next general CRP sign up period.**
23. Comment was made by member on the visible decline of Monarch butterflies on their farm. What happened to the Monarch? Member commented that the problem was the use of pesticides and herbicides. Independent ecosystems need to be applied and successes need to be measured in the benefits observed rather than money spent.
24. Are there current efforts to control the invasive species, Teasel? Large areas can be observed along Highway 65. **From a DNR standpoint, work is being done with Missouri Department of Transportation and other agencies on invasive species issues. Teasel is also invading grassland and pastures and will take a combined effort to control. From a conservation standpoint, nap weed is another major concern because pasture land and glades are susceptible to invasion.**
25. What about the Feral Hog issue in the state? **Eradication efforts are being concentrated on the isolated populations. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has provided Federal money to bring on more staff to help address the issue. To be effective, 70% of the population has to be controlled and right now 30% is likely the control rate of the population. More concentrated efforts and increased partnering is needed.**
26. What does nonpoint mean? **A nonpoint source is a source of pollution that can't be identified.**
27. Two questions were presented concerning SWCP Cover Crop program. First, has the requirement to no-till prior to the cover crop practice been dropped? Secondly, is there a limitation on acres this time? **Yes, however, the crop you plant in the cover crop has to be no-tilled. There is no limitation on acres but there is a landowner lifetime cap of \$20,000.**



28. Member commended NRCS for Soil Health efforts and the presentation presented by Doug Peterson. Drinking water must be cleaned and the majority of issues to that process are related to agriculture runoff.
30. Is everyone aware of the research coming out of the University of Northern Iowa on using prairie buffer strips and vegetative terraces? **Yes, the use of strips of plants are aimed at catching sediment.**
31. A member asked the committee to consider practices with multiple benefits, such as using more native diverse vegetation, lowering funds for tillage and terrace, and increasing funds for soil health. **NRCS is very supportive of warm season grasses. NRCS agreed that practices should be looked at based on the effectiveness and efficiency to address resource concerns.**
32. Attendee mentioned a cover crop tool for decision making. **The economic cover crop tool was actually developed here in Missouri by Lauren Cartwright and is available to be used.**
33. Member discussed the current issue in Iowa surrounding a suit involving Des Moines Water Works and local upstream drainage districts. Des Moines Water Works credits agriculture runoff, high nitrates, for increased expense to provide clean water.
34. Member commended Doug Peterson for making Soil Health interesting. Last year's warm season native's impact on sequestration of water was one of the better things I have seen in these committee meetings and I appreciate it, as well as this year's presentation.
35. Attendee voiced concerns on the ability of operators to change rotations on farms with highly erodible land when a change is made to FSA records. **Yes, policy provides a new operator the option to change the conservation plan. However, the comments will be considered moving forward.**
36. Member recommended the Cover Crop (340) practice not be combined with other practices for eligibility due to the differences in operations across the state. Concerned that tying cover crops to other practices would lessen the interest growing around the state for cover crops.
37. Attendee commended NRCS staff for working with producers in southeast Missouri. Offered concern over questions that were posed about making soil health mandatory for producers to be eligible for other practices. Feels putting restrictions or requirements on cover crops in EQIP is probably going to be a major hurdle, especially since operations vary across the state and cover crops may not work on every acre of land.
38. Member observed that many dollars are going to assist many people in Missouri. There are a large number of contracts and much of the activity is occurring outside the categories of CAFOs. Smaller livestock operations are receiving EQIP assistance as well. Philosophical differences should not take away from the fact that a lot of conservation work is being implemented.
39. Member reiterated the concern of legitimacy of the STC subcommittees. Stressed how important the subcommittee is to the entire process. Member recommended the data provided by NRCS be more consistent. Asked if notes taken at the EQIP subcommittee meeting in April went out to the

subcommittee? Yes. The various comments were provided in the presentation sent to EQIP subcommittee members. NRCS will make efforts to provide more consistent programmatic information in the future.

40. Member commended J.R. Flores for the support of the STC. Enlightened by the passion demonstrated by everyone involved in the committee. Added that Monarch populations have declined by 90%. We need more emphasis on Soil Health, more emphasis on grassland systems, more emphasis on improving conditions for diversification. Commended NRCS for proposing the addition of 512-warm season grasses in the Wildlife subaccount.

41. Member commended everyone involved in the meeting on the level of partnership displayed in Missouri. It is good that we have common goals to make things better for the natural resources of our state.